



Tax Cut A Done Deal

Amendment 1 passage saves homeowners \$240 average

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ST. PETERSBURG -- Amendment 1 passed easily Tuesday night, riding comfortably on the coattails of its No. 1 supporter, Gov. Charlie Crist, and defying pollsters.

Realtors gathered in a hotel bar at the bayfront Renaissance Vinoy Resort cheered as the results were splashed across large-screen TVs. Fireworks could be seen exploding over Tampa Bay.

"The people of Florida have spoken and they have demanded relief, tax relief," Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, of North Fort Myers, told a cheering crowd of about 50 supporters. "This is a great day for Florida."

With 99 percent of the precincts reporting, here was the vote on Amendment 1:

- Yes, 2,364,923 votes, 64 percent
- No, 1,477,465 votes, 36 percent

Mark Pudlow, a spokesman for the Florida Education Association, a chief opponent, wasn't willing to concede, but acknowledged the measure appeared headed for passage.

"We still have serious inequities in our property tax system," Pudlow said. "We're going to have to find a reliable way to fund our schools that isn't seriously deficient."

Buoyed by the results, lawmakers are poised for another round of tax-cutting proposals, including measures that would make it easier for property owners to challenge their assessments in court and giving breaks to waterfront hotels and marinas.

"That is a huge coup for the people of Southwest Florida," said Rep. Trudi Williams, R-south Lee County. "It should really improve the economy, especially in the housing market, which is where we really need it."

Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Indian River, a key negotiator for the proposal, said this is not the end of the fight.

"I think it sends the message that the people of Florida are ready to put a limit on the money local government spends," he said.

The results mean that for the first time, homeowners will be able to take their accumulated Save Our Homes assessment savings with them when they move. Homes worth more than \$50,000 will get a boost to their \$25,000 homestead exemption, but not for school taxes, saving the average homeowner \$240.

Commercial and nonhomestead property owners will see a 10 percent annual Save Our Homes-like cap on their assessments. Businesses will get a \$25,000 exemption on the tangible personal property taxes they pay on items such as equipment, wiping more than 1 million small businesses off the rolls entirely.

Opponents, including teachers, firefighters and government worker unions, were bracing for the worst. Teachers predicted more failing schools and local governments warned about loss of services and cutbacks in police and fire protection.

The passage was not only a personal victory for Crist, but a testament to the power of fundraising. Supporters at "Yes on 1" racked up more than \$4.1 million.